Chapter 4

Adolfo Vienrich, Tarma’s Radical Intellectual: 1867–1908

Adolfo Vienrich abandoned his privileged life as a scientist and intellectual in the capital to return home to Tarma and join the radical movement. He has already featured in the two previous chapters that focused on the Provincial Council. For Vienrich, safeguarding municipal autonomy and struggling against state centralism were his deepest political concerns. Now, in this chapter, I move Tarma’s leading radical intellectual to center stage. The range of Vienrich’s passions and encyclopedic knowledge were not unusual for an intellectual of his time living in a capital city, but for a small town pharmacist, they were extraordinary. His interests embraced European political philosophy; scientific thought, especially biology and medicine; Latin American history; new thinking in education and pedagogy. Yet later generations would remember him first and foremost as a pioneering specialist in the Quechua language and collector of indigenous fables, for example, Cornejo Polar (1989). In Vienrich, we find a curious bifurcation with regard to the way he has been remembered: occasionally as a radical leader, but for the most part as Peru’s first folklorist.

After presenting what can be learnt about his early years and intellectual formation, I shall concentrate on three aspects of the radicalism Vienrich brought with him from Lima. These were the importance he gave to mobilizing a workers’ movement, installing a rational universal education, and harnessing new scientific knowledge to protect the town from deadly disease. I shall leave until the following chapter a discussion of what Vienrich learnt from the Andean world and his insights into contemporary indigenous society. In many ways, Vienrich can be seen as an exemplar of political counter currents
CIRCULATION AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN PERU

Antonio Gramsci made famous, we find that Vienrich moved out of the comfort zone of the “traditional intellectual” who shared the world view, language, and esprit de corps of the clase letrada in support of the class in power. But he was thwarted from moving to a position of “organic intellectual” because of the way Andean society was stratified by race as well as by class. Even though conditions in Andean Peru at the turn of the twentieth century differed from those in northern Italy about which Gramsci would later write, both men were inspired by European anarchism and socialism and placed their hopes on the revolutionary potential of the urban working class. They had come to appreciate the importance of fostering an alternative education, seen as an emancipatory project through which workers would see through the false claims made by the ruling class and national bourgeoisie, and enabled to liberate themselves from class oppression. Living in a postcolonial society, Vienrich was also aware that a Peruvian nation still had to be built and this was only possible through universal education nationalist in spirit, that accepted workers and indígenas as full rights-bearing citizens.

The Making of an Andean Political Intellectual

Adolfo Diego Vienrich de la Canal was the eldest of seven children born to Adolfo Vienrich Bünter (1825–1897), an immigrant from Berlin, and Concepción de la Canal (1847–1934), daughter of a property-owning family of Tarma. After arriving in Peru, the elder Vienrich settled in Cerro de Pasco where he opened a pharmacy. After marriage, the couple moved to Lima where their first son, Adolfo, was born in 1867. The family returned to Tarma in 1874 where el alemán (the German) once again opened a pharmacy and gained the reputation of being a public spirited citizen, serving on the Provincial Council (where he was responsible for hygiene) and the Sociedad de Beneficencia Pública de Tarma (Tarma Beneficence Society) which took over the administration of hospitals and cemeteries from the church. In addition, he took part in the Guardia Urbana, a kind of home guard formed in 1879 at the start of the War of the Pacific by foreigners to protect private property, check credentials of foreigners coming to town, shut down illegal bars, expel vagrants, and escort drunks to the military barracks. When news came in 1881 that